

THE  
HOUSE OF COMMONS  
AND THE  
GERMAN SITUATION

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Speeches by :

The Rt. Hon. J. Ramsay Macdonald, M.P.

The Rt. Hon. Winston Churchill, M.P.

The Rt. Hon. Sir Austen Chamberlain, M.P.

The Rt. Hon. Sir John Simon, M.P.

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ISSUED BY FRIENDS OF EUROPE,  
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**THE PRIME MINISTER:**

(Mr. J. Ramsay Macdonald)

"The House will be aware that this day was originally given for a Debate on foreign affairs, the intention being to review the European situation in the light of the Conferences that have been held in Rome, Paris and London, and the subsequent meetings at Stresa and Geneva. To-day, however, it is impossible to separate these topics from some general consideration of armaments. . . .

**The London Declaration.**

The result of the Conferences at Rome, Paris and London was the issue of what has come to be known as the London Declaration of 3rd February last. The Declaration is one of rather remarkable significance. In that Declaration it was specifically stated that one of the objects of the negotiations contemplated was to be a freely negotiated armament pact with Germany and other Powers, which would take the place of the military clauses of Part V of the Treaty of Versailles. If that could be done successfully, the greater part of our immediate European dangers would disappear. *Clearly the London Declaration indicated that we are moving away from the Versailles régime and were entering upon a European relationship based upon free negotiation of security and of armed strength.* When such changes have begun, however small the beginning may be, they broaden and widen in proportion to the mutual goodwill and confidence which arise from them.

**Proclamation of German Conscription and Rearmament.**

On 3rd February Governments like our own which had begun patiently to re-establish goodwill in Europe had good cause for feeling that prospects were improving, and when in the course of a day or so Germany accepted the Declaration, at any rate as a basis for discussion, our justification for hope I think was reasonably strengthened. It is greatly to be deplored that at *that* moment the German Government announced its intention to impose conscription and to take immediate steps to raise its peace strength to 550,000 men as well as to create a military air force. The Council of the League of Nations has dealt with these events. That has been done, and we need not harp upon it. The historian will deal with the trains of the causes; the politician has to face the actual situation, practically and objectively, and I hope

NOTE.

The House of Commons Debate of May 2nd, 1935, took place at a time of national uneasiness in respect of the rapid air-armament of Germany. We have reproduced verbatim those portions of the speeches which are concerned with Germany. No one can read these speeches to-day without recognizing that in November, 1934, Mr. Churchill was nearest to the truth in his understanding of the German situation.

For the statements on that occasion we refer our readers to Pamphlet No. 19: "The House of Commons and German Rearmament."

June, 1935.



with calm common sense. He has to answer the question whether he is now to abandon his attempts to build up, on general confidence, a peace system in Europe or seek refuge in those combinations of sheer force which have never yet saved him from war and never will. When we consider the future, it is well to note that *Herr Hitler has said that though he would sign nothing which he thought he could not carry out, yet if he gave an undertaking he would never break it.* Be it also noted that *Herr Hitler has publicly declared the readiness and determination of the German Government to accept both the spirit and the letter of the Locarno Pact.* He made that declaration in the Reichstag on 30th January, 1934.

#### **The Stresa Conference.**

The declaration of 3rd February gave general satisfaction all over Europe, because it promised the beginning of a sound European settlement. When reporting to the House upon the effects of the Stresa Conference, I informed it that nothing had been done at Stresa which changed that Declaration. Indeed, the text of the Stresa conclusions reaffirmed point after point the London communiqué. It is important that that fact should be emphasized, and I do so once more. The London Declaration made proposals for the ending of certain Central and Eastern European fears and unsettlement by a system of non-interference and mutual security pacts. This country is not directly affected by those proposals, but it looks upon them, or any variation of them that may be made in order to secure the desired result with a friendly eye, and has advised, wherever its advice seemed to be welcome or useful, that the negotiations should be pursued with the idea of producing something really effective.

In regard to Central Europe, the Italian Government propose to convoke a meeting of the Governments concerned, including Germany, to discuss a scheme. His Majesty's Government will not be represented at Rome by a delegation because it is well understood that we are not undertaking any new commitments in this regard. But we shall be represented by an observer, so that we may be kept in the closest touch with the course and movements of the discussion, and contribute to it in any way that we usefully and properly can.

As regards Eastern Europe, it is specially in the power of Germany to make a valuable contribution to the system of security in that region. The German Chancellor during the Foreign Secretary's visit to Berlin declared his willingness,

in principle, to negotiate a multilateral non-aggression pact with the countries of Eastern Europe, and, although we had hoped that Germany would be prepared to join in a more comprehensive arrangement, nevertheless the proposal put forward by Herr Hitler ought not to be allowed to drop, and we trust that Germany herself will take immediate steps to promote in more concrete shape the idea which her Chancellor has formulated. There is no reason why such a non-aggression pact should not harmonise with the mutual guarantee pact which France and the Soviet Government are now negotiating. Indeed, in my opinion, the two can very well supplement each other, and thus help towards creating a complete system of collective security in Eastern Europe.

I need not refer further to the various points of the London Declaration, which the Government consider contribute to the building up of peace structures in Europe, but I must make it clear to the House that so far as this Government is concerned we did not and do not consider that the security which they are meant to establish can be complete without German participation. And when the whole Declaration was reviewed at Stresa, the policy pursued by the representatives of this Government was to maintain the possibility of such co-operation. All these activities assume the idea of collective security in some form or another. No one plan has been devised to effect this, and it would be premature for any of us to commit ourselves to any one formula. The needs of countries vary, and experiments will have to be made. The general attitude of the Government is to approach the problem with a flexible mind in order to obtain so far as possible a realisation of the idea that it is an effective check upon aggression.

#### **German Responsibility.**

*It is manifest and indisputable that when these efforts are being made to build up a system of co-operation and good will in which Germany would take her due and proper part, such unilateral declarations as those just made in Berlin regarding land forces, air forces and naval forces, must profoundly disturb the peace of mind of the whole of Europe.* The Government has taken note of every helpful suggestion that has been made in Berlin and elsewhere, but it must observe that some feeling of mutual confidence has to be re-created before the full beneficial effects of international negotiations on details can be reaped. The instructions which we took with us to Stresa were not to make agreements



which excluded any country on account of what has happened from taking part in further negotiations on the lines of the London Declaration. As I have said, nothing done at Stresa annulled that Declaration. We recognize, with great regret, that circumstances have changed, but the general purpose of the Declaration still remains the objective of immediate British foreign policy.

#### **British Co-operation With France and Italy.**

It would be a great calamity if there were any weakening or deterioration in the confidence which exists between France, Italy and ourselves, and we shall take all the care we humanly can that that shall not happen. Our aim is to increase the number of co-operators, to try to prevent, with every device that is at our command, their being separated into different and rival camps. Will not Germany now come forward to show her readiness to help to restore the international confidence so rudely shaken by her recent independent action in regard to armaments? We are looking for a peace system, a peace pact in support of such declarations as the Kellogg, or, as it is sometimes called, the Paris Pact. I need not assure the House that in all these activities our policy is being pursued as loyal members of the League of Nations, and that we are convinced that international co-operation is the only basis upon which the peace of the world can rest. . . .

#### **The German Naval Programme.**

When the Foreign Secretary was at Berlin, he suggested that German representatives should come here, as representatives of other countries had already come, for a preliminary discussion with a view to a naval agreement in the future. That invitation was accepted. . . .

I must confess to great surprise that this moment was chosen by Germany to announce a shipbuilding programme, especially including submarines, which it could never have imagined would be of no immediate concern to us. British naval needs and ratios cannot be fixed in relation to home waters alone. We have unique responsibilities of a world-wide character different from other Powers. We are prepared to let every naval Power in the world know what these needs are, and, with the whole of our Imperial requirements in view, come to international agreements which will make expansion beyond rock bottom needs unnecessary, and thus prevent extravagance and sheer waste. The German deci-

sion to build submarines is ominous, and I do not intend to minimise its gravity, but we are still prepared, without in any way conceding the right to disregard any treaty provision, to receive German representatives in London for the contemplated preliminary discussions. . . .

#### **German Aircraft in Excess of Previous Statement.**

In the Debate last November certain estimates were put forward on the basis of our then estimates as to the strength of the German air force, and the assurance was given by the Lord President, on behalf of the Government, that in no circumstances would we accept any position of inferiority with regard to whatever air force might be raised in Germany in the future. If it were not so, that would put us in an impossible position of which the Government and Air Ministry are fully aware. In the course of the visit which the Foreign Secretary and the Lord Privy Seal paid to Berlin at the end of March, *the German Chancellor stated, as the House was informed on 3rd April that Germany had reached parity with Great Britain in the air.* Whatever may be the exact interpretation of this phrase in terms of air strength, it undoubtedly indicated that *the German force has been expanded to a point considerably in excess of the estimates which we were able to place before the House last year. That is a grave fact, with regard to which both the Government and the Air Ministry have taken immediate notice.* . . .

The Committee will remember that the London Declaration contained a reference to an air pact, and the subject, perhaps the Committee will also remember, was referred to by me in my report on the work done at Stresa. I will quote this Stresa resolution, if I may, because it may turn out to be of great importance. It runs as follows:

"As regards the proposed air pact for Western Europe, the representatives of the three Governments confirmed the principles and procedure that should be followed as envisaged in the London communique of the 3rd February, and agreed to continue actively the study of the question with a view to the drafting of a pact between the five Powers mentioned in the London communique and of any bilateral agreements which might accompany it."

#### **Proposals for Air Agreement.**

The resolution is under consideration at this moment by His Majesty's Government, but I wonder if I might interpolate, with no idea whatever of exceeding the intentions of the three Powers represented at Stresa, the thought that in connection with the further consideration of this Pact we might come to an agreement as regards air strengths. The



destructive possibilities of air warfare are perfectly appalling, and surely every civilized nation must strive its utmost to reduce the use of this terrible weapon. Moreover, I can imagine no more wasteful expenditure of national wealth than a competition in air forces, in which we will not engage unless it be absolutely forced upon us. As is the case with all forces, their value is relative to each other, and at this moment, before we have gone very far, the British Government urges, with all the influence it can command, that a halt should be called and that the Powers concerned should limit their air arms within well defined bounds to be fixed by free negotiation. If I may venture to do so, and make bold to do so, I recommend this especially to the German Government. Public opinion in this country quite clearly indicated approval of attempts to find practical and politic ways of setting up this instrument of mutual security, and if it were set in an international agreement as to the respective national strengths that opinion would be much more satisfied.

#### **British Policy.**

In this matter, we are moved by no thought of aggressive military alliances. They form no part of our purposes. But we are seeking with the Powers named, including Germany, a defensive combination against attack which will protect our civilian population in particular against the destruction which aerial warfare makes absolutely inevitable. It will thus be seen that our policy combines defence, collective security, international agreements upon armaments, and peace. As I have said, and I repeat, it is not aimed at military alliances but at the widest possible co-operation. The present good understanding between France, Italy and ourselves we value as a guarantee of peace. It threatens no one. Every other nation which contemplates peace will be welcome in this free companionship.

In this survey I have not minimised the sombre aspect of the present situation, but the outlook—and I say this with great conviction and considerable intimacy of knowledge—has chances of appeasement as well as palpable dangers, and it is the constant care of this country to help on the changes that must come by negotiated agreement and without disturbance to the peace of Europe or of the world. I make bold to crave the generous support of Members of all parties in the House for this survey, general as it may be, of the international situation and of the policy of the Government regarding it."

#### **MR. CHURCHILL:**

#### **Recent Documents on Foreign Policy.**

" . . . We have before us in the sphere of foreign policy three new and separate documents of much importance. We have the League of Nations resolution; we have the declarations of the Stresa Conference; and we have the Prime Minister's article in his own organ, the 'News-Letter.' I find myself—I think in common with the great majority of the House, not in one party but in all parties—in very general agreement with the Prime Minister and His Majesty's Government upon the measures taken by the Government in these three documents. The sentiments expressed in the 'News-Letter' about the dangers of the German re-armament are akin to those which I myself have ventured, the Committee may remember, to express several times in the last two or three years, beginning in the autumn of 1932. The Stresa declaration, including the statement that the three Powers, Great Britain, Italy and France, will keep in touch with one another, and are pledged to study the maintenance of peace in common—I am not quoting the actual words—seems to be no more than national safety or national survival requires. There remains the Resolution of the Council of the League of Nations complaining of the growth of German armaments and of the unilateral violation of treaties. I have seen a great deal of criticism in quarters where one would least expect it of France for appealing to the League of Nations against Germany, and of the League of Nations for giving a faithful verdict upon the questions submitted for their judgment.

#### **Support of League of Nations.**

When I hear extreme pacifists denouncing this act of the League of Nations I am left wondering what foundation these gentlemen offer to countries to abandon individual national armaments. We are reminded how in a state of savagery every man is armed and is a law unto himself, but that civilization means that courts are established, that men lay aside their arms and carry their causes to the tribunal. This presupposes a tribunal to which men, when they are in doubt or anxiety, may freely have recourse. It presupposes a tribunal which is not incapable of giving a verdict. Personally, I admire greatly the self-restraint and courage with which France addressed herself to the League of



Nations. It was far better surely than that she should have dealt in ultimatums or should have seized territories as hostages, such as would have been the practice in former generations. She appealed to the tribunal which has been set up, and I also admire the spirit of that tribunal and of these different countries, some great, and some small, drawn from different parts of the world, who showed themselves according to their lights prepared to give justice though the Heavens fall. If we are to be told that it is very wrong for France to go to the League of Nations, and how foolish and tactless of them to give their opinion, if that view is to be held by those who have hitherto told us to look to this international procedure, then you have absolutely stultified all your arguments, for never again, if it is the case, will nations be prepared to abandon the security which resides in strong national armaments. All that prospect, and the only prospect which opens itself before our eyes, of establishing a reign of law and building up a great international structure to which all nations will accede—that prospect and hope will dwindle and die away. Therefore, *I am in general agreement with His Majesty's Government upon all these three steps which have been taken by them in the last few months in company with other nations.*

#### **The Danger of Acting Too Late.**

If I criticise these measures, it is not at all because of their character but because of their tardiness. Why was all this not done two or three years ago? If the Prime Minister two years ago had thought what he now thinks in his "News-Letter" about the German danger, he need perhaps never have published his thoughts to the world. Instead of his lectures to a nation now already so heavily armed, he could have imparted them as wise guidance to the Cabinet. If only the French Government two-and-a-half years ago, when the German process of re-armament began, had laid their much talked of dossier before the League of Nations and demanded justice or protection from the concert of Europe, if only Great Britain, France and Italy had pledged themselves two or three years ago to work in association for maintaining peace and collective security, how different might have been our position. Indeed, it is possible that the dangers into which we are steadily penetrating would never have arisen. But the world, and the Parliaments and public opinion, would have none of that in those days two or three years ago. When the situation was manageable it was

neglected, and now that it is thoroughly out of hand we apply too late the remedies which then might have effected a cure. There is nothing new in the story. It is as old as the Sibylline books. It falls into the immense dismal category of the fruitlessness of experience and the confirmed unteachability of mankind. Want of foresight, unwillingness to act when action would be simple and effective, lack of clear thinking, confusion of counsel until the emergency comes, until self-preservation strikes its jarring gong—these are the features which constitute the endless repetition of history.

#### **What German Militarism Has Achieved.**

All this leads me to the gravest matter of all, and the only other matter with which I propose to deal, namely, the state of our national defences and their reactions upon foreign policy. Things have got much worse, but they have also got much clearer. It used to be said that armaments depend on policy. It is not always true, but I think that at this juncture it is true to say that policy depends, to a large extent, upon armaments. It is true to say that we have reached a position where the choice of policy is dictated by considerations of defence. During the last three years, not only under the government of Herr Hitler, but before him, under the government of Chancellor Brüning, Germany worked unceasingly upon a vast design of rearmament on a scale which would give that mighty, gifted, scientific, valiant race of 60,000,000 or 70,000,000 such a predominance in Europe as would enable it, if it chose—and why should it not choose?—to reverse the results of the Great War. The method should be noted by the Committee. The method has been to acquire mastery in the air, and, under the protection of that mastery in the air, to develop—and it is fortunately a much longer process—the land and sea forces which, when completed would dominate over all Europe. This design is being completed as fast as possible, and the first part of it—German ascendancy in the air—is already a fact. The military part is far advanced, and the naval part is now coming into view. . . .

#### **Germany and Air Power.**

For the last two years some of us have been endeavouring to convince His Majesty's Government of the scale and pace at which German aviation was proceeding. We debated it in March, 1933, on the Air Estimates of 1934, in August, 1934, in November, 1934, and quite recently, in March, 1935. On all these occasions the most serious warnings



were given by Private Members who spoke on this subject, of whom I was one. The alarm bells were set ringing, and even jangling, in good time if only they had been listened to. This afternoon I am not concerned with what Private Members said in giving their warning, but I am bound to address myself to the main statements and promises which were elicited on these occasions from His Majesty's Government. In March, 1934, we had the first declaration of the Lord President:

"Any Government of this country—a National Government more than any, and this Government—will see to it that in air strength and air power this country shall no longer be in a position inferior to any country within striking distance of our shores." (Official Report, 8th March, 1934; col. 2078, Vol. 286).

That declaration was considered of enormous importance. That was in March, but nothing happened until August, when, under the pressure, not indeed of those hon. Gentlemen in this House who were raising this matter, for their pressure could easily have been disdained, but under the pressure of events, the Government produced a five-years' programme for increasing the home defence portion of the Royal Air Force to 75 squadrons, comprising 880 machines, by 1939. Anyone could see that that was utterly inadequate, and that it bore no relation whatever to the pace at which German aviation was developing and to the military character which it was assuming. At that time, nine months ago, I urged that without a day's delay measures should be taken, first, to double, and then to re-double the Royal Air Force. My right hon. Friend the Member for Darwen (Sir H. Samuel) made a speech to-day very different in its note. I am most grateful to him for the change of note from that in the speeches which he delivered a few months ago on the subject, and he indicated that the future measures which may be proposed by the Government would be received in a spirit of most earnest consideration by the party of which he is the spokesman. But when he spoke in August last he spoke very harshly of the proposal that I made and, as the Committee will remember, described me as a "Malay run amok." Anyone can see now, and most of all the Ministers responsible, that the kind of policy of doubling and re-doubling the Air Force which I then proposed was the least which should have been set on foot. If nine months ago these measures had been begun you would to-day have been beginning to reap the harvest and beginning to obtain results, and very different would have been the position. In November some of us

moved an Amendment to the Address, and I took the responsibility then of making some definite statements, or rather under-statements, about the German air menace. . . .

We are told that Herr Hitler made a statement to the Foreign Secretary at Berlin in the conversations, which it now seems were most fortunately undertaken, otherwise I suppose we should never have known. We have not always been accustomed to depend for our information upon statements, however frank and friendly, that may be made by Rulers of other States. *My point is that all these statements that were made by the Lord President of the Council, and later, on behalf of the Government and under instructions from the Government, by the Under-Secretary for Air, are admitted to be untrue. I do not say that they were made in bad faith, but they were utterly wrong.* . . . We have had a confession from the Prime Minister to-day that the then estimates have been found to be below what is now understood to be the truth.

#### Germany's Actual Air Strength.

Look at the Press which supports the Government, great newspapers like the "Daily Telegraph" and the "Times," which are now making statements much more definite than I ventured to commit myself to six months ago. Let anyone who chooses read the statement in the "Times" to-day—a paper devoted to the cause of peace and particularly friendly to Germany, a strong supporter of the Government. It says:

"German strength in first-line aircraft is assumed at present to be not less than 1,020, which is double the first-line strength of the Royal Air Force, including 171 aeroplanes of the Fleet Air Arm and 264 in units overseas. The strength of the British home defence force is 500 aeroplanes."

That is a very formidable assertion, and, as far as I know, it is quite correct. *There is no doubt that to-day—I do not think it will be challenged at all from the Treasury Bench—the strength and scale of the German Air Force, whether judged by military machines or by first-line strength, as the saying goes, is at present already substantially superior in numbers to ours.*

#### Germany's Up-To-Date Air Equipment.

There is a second unpleasant chapter in this subject upon which I will merely, as it were, indicate the title and the contents. *The German military machines have all been produced within the last 2½ years. Therefore they are of the latest design. An hon. Gentleman has just placed in my*



hands a telegram which has arrived and is published in one of the evening newspapers, in which General Goering says: "We have no old machines. Our planes are the most up-to-date in existence."

That statement has been newly printed in the evening Press. Many of our designs, on the other hand, are seven or eight years old. The average of our machines—these facts are perfectly well known; there is nothing in them that is not known, or I would not say it—is certainly double in age to the designs which have been created in Germany. . . .

It cannot be disputed, that both in numbers and in quality Germany has already obtained a marked superiority over our home defence Air Force.

#### **Germany's Capacity for Air Output.**

But it is the third chapter of this story which is the most grievous. The rate and volume which the output of German military aeroplanes has attained is many times superior to our own. The Under-Secretary told us six weeks ago that the additions that would be made to our first-line air strength, which was then thought sufficient, would be 151. There is reason to believe, as I said on that occasion, that the comparable German output of military machines is between, at least, 100 and 150 per month. Many people would put it much higher. *The German air industry is therefore turning out military machines at perhaps ten times the rate at which ours are turned out, and those machines are being formed into squadrons for which long-trained, ardent personnel are already assembled, and for which, an ample number of aerodromes are already prepared. Therefore, at the end of this year, when we were to have had a 50 per cent. superiority over Germany, they will be, at least, between three and four times as strong as we are.*

#### **Germany's Industrial Organization for War.**

*Behind all this rapid peace time production lies, the industry of Germany, fully organized for war manufacture and steadily tending in its character into the condition of war manufacture. This can be drawn upon at any time gradually and to any extent which they may choose. Where, then, is this pledge of air parity and that we would not accept any inferiority to whatever the German Air Force might be? The Prime Minister said to-day that the Lord President's declaration stands. It stands only as a declaration. The facts do not support that assertion. It is absolutely certain that we have lost air parity already both in the number of*

machines and in their quality. It is certain that at the end of this year we shall be far worse off relatively than we are now. Our home defence force will be for a long period ahead a rapidly diminishing fraction of the German air force. It may reasonably be urged that the units of the German Air Force, having been prepared in conditions of secrecy, have not at the present time acquired the efficiency of our squadrons in air tactics and in formation flying. It is very dangerous to underrate German efficiency in any military matters. All my experience has taught me to think that any such supposition would be most imprudent. Anyhow, now that the Germans are openly marshalling and exercising their squadrons and forming them with great rapidity, we may take it that six months of this summer and autumn will amply give them the combined training which they require, having regard to the long, careful individual preparations which have been made, therefore any superiority which we may at this moment possess in personnel and in formation flying and in air manoeuvring is a wasting asset, and will be gone by the end of the autumn, having regard to the enormously increased German air strength and the superiority of their machines.

#### **What is to be Done.**

The Prime Minister in his article in the "News-Letter" used the word "ambush." The word must have sprung from the anxieties of his heart, for it is an ambush into which, in spite of every warning, we have fallen. I have stated the position in general terms and I have tried to state it not only moderately but quite frigidly. *Here I pause to ask the Committee to consider what these facts mean and what their consequences impose.* I confess that words fail me. In the year 1708 Mr. Secretary St. John, by a calculated Ministerial indiscretion, revealed to the House the fact that the battle of Almanza had been lost in the previous summer because only 8,000 English troops were actually in Spain out of the 29,000 that had been voted by the House of Commons for this service. When he made that revelation it is recorded that the House sat in silence for half an hour, no Member caring to speak or wishing to make a comment upon so staggering an announcement, and yet how incomparably small that event was to what we have now to face. That was merely a frustration of policy. Nothing that could happen to Spain in that war could possibly have contained in it any form of dangers which were potentially mortal.



But what is our position to-day? For many months, perhaps for several years, most critical for the peace of Europe, we are inexorably condemned to be in a position of frightful weakness. *If Germany were the only Power with which we were concerned, if we stood alone compared with Germany, and if there were no other great countries in Europe who share our anxieties and dangers and our point of view, and if air warfare were the only kind of warfare by which the destinies of nations was decided, we should then have to recognise that this country, which seemed so safe and strong a few years ago, which bore with unconquerable strength all the strains and shocks of the Great War, which has guarded its homeland, and its independence for so many centuries, would lie at the discretion of men now governing a foreign country.* There are, however, friendly nations with whom we may concert our measures of air defence, and there are other factors, military and naval, of which in combination we can dispose. Under the grim panoply which Germany has so rapidly assumed there may be all kinds of stresses and weaknesses, economic, political and social which are not apparent, but upon which we should not rest ourselves.

It seems undoubted that there is an effective policy open to us at the present time by which we may preserve both our safety and our freedom. Never must we despair, never must we give in, but *we must face facts and draw true conclusions from them.* The policy of detachment or isolation about which we have heard so much and which in many ways is so attractive, is no longer open. If we were to turn our backs upon Europe thereby alienating every friend, we should by disinteresting ourselves in their fate invite them to disinterest themselves in ours. Is it then expected that we can go off with a wallet full of German Colonies gathered in the last war and a world-wide collection of territories and trade interests gathered in the past, when the greatness of our country was being built up, when all the time we should in this vital matter of air defence be condemned to protracted, indefinite and agonising inferiority? Such a plan has only to be stated to be rejected.

There is a wide measure of agreement in the House to-night, and our foreign policy has made it so. *We are bound to act in concert with France and Italy and other Powers, great and small, who are anxious to preserve peace.* I would not refuse the co-operation of any government which plainly conformed to that test as long as they were willing to work under the authority and sanction of the League of Nations. Such a

policy is not to close the door upon a revision of the Treaty, but it does procure a sense of responsibility and stability, an adequate gathering together of all reasonable Powers for self-defence, which must be assembled before any inquiry of whatever character can be entered upon. In this august association for collective security we must build up defence forces of all kinds and combine air action with those of friendly Powers, so that we may be allowed to live in quiet ourselves and retrieve the woeful miscalculations of which we are at present the dupes and of which, unless we are warned in time we may some day be the victims."



## SIR AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN:

"My purpose in rising now is similar to that of the visit of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Berlin: it is exploratory. I do not know whether I ask too much in requesting that the Foreign Secretary might be invited to come into the House. While waiting for his return, I will make a few observations about the speeches to which we have just listened. It has not been my good fortune recently to find myself always in agreement with my right hon. Friend, the Member for Epping (Mr. Churchill), but I found myself to-day sharing his anxiety, puzzled, as he was puzzled, by the ignorance of our Government as to what has been going on, and gravely concerned about the situation which has been allowed to grow up and the future with which we are confronted.

### **The British Government Caught Napping.**

*I think the Government must reckon that public confidence has had a great shock when, after the repeated declarations as to the relative strength in the air of our country and of Germany, so lately renewed and reaffirmed, we now find that our Government have been wholly misinformed throughout.* It is not as if the information which my right hon. Friend the Member for Epping gave to the House, and those who raised the question with him, was not, in large measure at any rate, capable of investigation. It is not as if there were not indications and signs as to what was going on in Germany, signs which could not be concealed from visitors to that country, and which surely were not unknown to the intelligence service of other countries, even though it remained a closed book to our own. I frankly confess that I think the Government owe on this matter some greater and clearer explanation than they have yet given. . . . I confess for my part that I think the situation in Europe to-day is graver than it has been at any time since 1914. . . .

I think it will take all the energy of the Government in putting our defences in an adequate position the kind of concentrated energy which was shown during the War in rising to the height of the great demand which that War made—and all the energy and all the wisdom that our Foreign Minister and his colleagues can muster to guide us safely through these difficult and it may be dangerous years. That is all I propose to say upon that aspect of the case.

## **The Foreign Secretary and the Berlin-Hitler Talks.**

I said when I rose that my purpose in intervening was like that of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in going to Berlin—that it was exploratory. With what the Prime Minister told us I am, on the whole, satisfied. I make one reservation to which I shall return later. I must remind the Government that when this Debate was first asked for it was not asked for merely in order to learn about Stresa, but to learn the results of the visits which Ministers were paying to Berlin, Moscow and Prague. It was postponed because the meeting at Stresa was taking place almost immediately after, but it was understood that it would cover those visits to the foreign capitals which I have named and the conversations there, as well as the conversations at Stresa and Geneva. I want to ask the Foreign Secretary when he speaks to give us the fullest account that he thinks compatible with his duty—that is with the public interest—the fullest account he can, of the attitude of the German Government as revealed to him in the Berlin conversations. I am sorry, as we are all sorry, that the Lord Privy Seal is not here, but, no doubt, my right hon. Friend could also add something about the attitude which the Lord Privy Seal found in the other capitals. But I think it is of prime importance to us all that we should know as fully as we can, what is the mind of the German Government. It was for that reason that my right hon. Friend went to Berlin. It was to find out what they really meant. What answer has he brought back to the Cabinet? What answer will he give to that question to this House?

### **Defence of the Treaty of Versailles.**

I am not one of those who think that, in all the circumstances the Versailles Treaty was, in its territorial dispositions, a bad Treaty, but I think our notions at that time of reparations, or of the amount, whether in the form of payment of debt or payment of reparations, which could be transferred without economic disaster bore no relation to the facts. But those economic provisions of the Treaty were swept away long ago. Other aspects of the Treaty have been modified to Germany's advantage, but there is this recurrent talk in certain circles of this peace having been made under conditions without parallel in history—a dictated peace and not a negotiated peace—and there remains with a great many people the idea that Germany has justifiable and legitimate reclamations to make and that, in a phrase, our hands are not quite clean, when we censure or blame Germany for her



breach of her Treaty engagements. Very well. As I have said, I think you will find it very difficult to draw the borders of European States more justly than they were drawn by the Treaty of Versailles unless you ignore altogether the principle of nationality which, at that time, by common accord, was taken as the guiding principle, and revert to the doctrine of the balance of power or the doctrine of dynastic interest, or one of those older doctrines against which the whole trend of the nineteenth century had been in revolt and for which we and everybody thought we were substituting a better system when we adopted the doctrine of nationality and even carried it to the length of self-determination.

I am not saying that there are not concessions which might still be made. I am not saying that we fulfilled—I will not say our obligations, because I think we have fulfilled all our obligations—but the expectations which we had ourselves inspired and which we had encouraged the Germans to cherish also. We did not fulfil all of them. If you ask, "Is it reasonable to expect that for all time Germany would be bound by an entirely one-sided disarmament?" I am prepared to say that it is not. That would not be a good basis for the peace of the world.

#### **Germany's High-Handed and Arbitrary Action.**

*But what to me is significant and grave is the moment which Germany took not merely to evade, for she never has fulfilled the Disarmament Clauses—in fact, when she entered the League she did not come in with a clean certificate of having kept her Treaty, but we accepted the phrase that she was in course of performing it—the moment she took, not to begin rearmament or reservation, but to declare by her own words alone, that she would be no longer bound by the Treaty that she had established an air force, and that she was establishing a navy. That was the moment, in the case of the air force, when she had been invited by the London communiqué to come and sit down at a table as one free nation in discussion with other equally free nations to settle some new system which would remove her disabilities and subject us all to limitations. In an exactly similar way, the moment she chose to announce her submarines was the moment when she had been invited, and had accepted the invitation, to come and discuss naval limitations.*

What is the meaning of it? That is why I ask the Secretary of State for light on the mind of Germany. I think the

right hon. and gallant Gentleman who spoke last touched in the earlier part of his speech, on the great political issue which underlies the present situation. Is there to be a collective system or is there not? The invitation of the London communiqué is an invitation to Germany to take part in a collective system, 'an invitation to meet and discuss, as we have already discussed with America and Japan and as we have discussed with France and Italy, naval limitations. That is the kind of invitation—to take part in a collective system. Does Germany mean to have any part in it? She withdrew from the Disarmament Conference. *I think it was a great mistake that when she withdrew the other Powers did not go on with their work, telling her that her place was vacant, that they would welcome her back gladly, but that they were not going to stop merely because she did not choose to co-operate.* I think it would have been difficult for Germany to have refused the result which such a continuation of their work might have produced. It may be that that is still the proper solution if Germany refuses to come back or to take part in these conversations.

#### **Germany and "Equality of Status."**

But upon what are you going to base the peace of Europe? In what does public faith consist and what meaning has it if, when you are suffering, it may be, under grievances, but when you are invited to come and sit down and discuss with other nations how those grievances may be removed, you say, "Thank you for nothing. We do it by our own strong arm. We wait on no man. We ask no man's agreement." "Force is right," General Goering said the other day. What becomes of the public law? What becomes of public faith? What becomes of your collective system? These are questions that are raised; and I want to know whether my right hon. Friend when he went to Berlin invited or received from Herr Hitler, who was, we understand, very communicative, a clear statement of Germany's policy and her claims. *She says she wants equality of status. Did he give any definition of what Germany means by that?*

We are assured in the speeches which are made to be heard outside that country, that Germany's only desire is to be in a position to defend herself. Did the German Government give my right hon. Friend an assurance that, if we agreed to German rearmament on a scale that would put her in as good a position to defend herself as any other nation would be in, that that was the end of the demand; that then Europe could rest in peace and that then she would be one



of those forces in the League at Geneva to preserve the peace to which she had consented? Or did she go further? . . .

#### **German Armaments and What Germany Wants.**

Similarly, I want to know, if Germany gets this equality in armaments, to what purpose is she going to put it? Is she satisfied to maintain the status quo or is this army which she asks for in order that she may feel safe at home, going to be used next day to make some neighbour or another feel unsafe just across the border and to extort from that neighbour—I do not think it is wrong to say at the point of the sword because it means under the threat of it—concessions which would never be freely made. Does, in fact, the removal of the dictated Peace of Versailles merely mean that there is to be a new dictated peace of Berlin? I think the time has come when we have to ask ourselves that; and I think the time has come when the Government ought to give us some light upon the answer. We ought to know what is the spirit of the people with whom we are dealing; what it is which would satisfy them; and whether there is a possibility of a permanent, consented peace with them on any terms, which are tolerable for those who, after all, were the victors in the great struggle of 1914 to 1918?

#### **British Responsibility for Collective Policy.**

I said that there was one point in the statement of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, about which I made a reservation. As the right hon. and gallant Gentleman who has just spoken observed, we all do lip-service to the collective system—and when I say we all do lip-service to it, I think we are perfectly sincere in our lip-service, but that we have not thought out what it means. Why are we not to be officially represented at Rome? Why are we only going to send an observer? The British Government have declared that Austrian independence is a British interest. I think they were right. I am quite certain that Austrian independence is one of the key pieces in the preservation of European peace. What is a collective system in which we are only an observer? What is the meaning of membership of the League if we only look on? I hope the Government will reconsider their decision. I am quite sure that the great issue now being raised by the action of Germany is: are we going to have a collective system such as it was the hope of those who brought the League of Nations into existence that they

would create? Are we going to sit down as friends to settle our differences, not being unreasonable, accepting finally if we accept at all the solution which is made until or unless it is varied by consent; or is some Power, or are some Powers, going to reject it and insist that they will do by and of themselves, in spite of any engagements and any treaties, whatever seems right and just in their own eyes, and that they are the sole judges of the right? That way peril lies.

#### **Germany Again Before the Bar of History.**

*Germany complained before the War of her encirclement. She forged her own encirclement by hammer blows of her own which she struck against the Anglo-French Entente.* When, by an act of singular wisdom, our two countries sat down to settle once and for all a dozen or more questions which for a century had kept them wrangling and bickering and put their peace in peril, Germany took that Entente and that settlement of old differences between two neighbours as a menace to herself. She did her best to break it, and she forged it under her own blows from an Entente into an Alliance. Is she going to do the same thing again? You cannot complain of encirclement or exclusion if you refuse to sit down to discuss these problems when you are invited to sit down and discuss them. If those who have offered to enter into partnership with you have had their offer refused, if those who have offered to you all the guarantees that they ask from you for themselves again have had their offer refused, you cannot complain if countries so treated then ask themselves what is in the mind of the Power which refuses to enter into any collective security, or to come into any European family, and what plans is it secretly nourishing; upon whose head is presently the sword to fall? You cannot complain if then they get together and provide for their own security in the absence of the one nation that will not join in the common guarantee.

I think it is of vital consequence that this House should be told, not later than to-day, what is the impression gathered by the Foreign Secretary in his conversations in Berlin. Is it a Germany that is really willing and anxious to come to an agreement? Or is it a Germany that is pushing here, seizing there, drilling her own people daily, building up the greatest army of Europe, building this immense air fleet, building a new navy? *Is it a nation, I will not say which wants war—for who does want war if he can have his will without it?—but a nation which, instead of being a partner in a collective*



*system, intends to present Europe with a Power so strong that Europe will be at its mercy, and that we shall have nothing to do but obey her commands? That is the question we have got to settle, and that is the question on which we want some light. I am quite certain that if we find Germany really is peacefully intent on entering into a partnership with other nations, that she will be welcomed by us as heartily, and perhaps more heartily, than by any other nation. After all, we have made great efforts to bring Germany really into a partnership, and we have perhaps made more efforts than anybody else. If she is of a partner's mind and of a peaceful intent, she will be welcome, but if she will not join the family of nations; if, instead of seeking to persuade, she means to extort or impose her will, then she will find this country in her path again, and with this country those great free Commonwealths which centre round it; and she will have met a force that will once again be her master."*

## THE FOREIGN SECRETARY:

(Sir John Simon)

"Anyone who has attended to this Debate to-day must feel, as we reach its conclusion, how deeply the gravity of the present European situation has sunk into the public mind.

### **League Policy—Great Britain and Regional Agreements.**

There is time to deal with two or three specific questions, and I will first take two questions put at the opening of his speech by the Leader of the Opposition. He asked whether he was to understand that the policy of the Government speaking for this country, was one which went back on the principles of the League, and whether regional pacts were to be regarded as a substitute or an alternative for the Covenant. Let me deal with that question straight away. The answer to it is "No." There is no solid ground whatever for setting up the Covenant on the one side and regional pacts on the other, as though they were two competitive or contradictory methods of mutual assistance.

The Treaty of Locarno, and, as far as I know, it has been approved in quarters opposite, is a regional pact. So far from its being opposed to the principles of the League, one of the first things that happened after my right hon. Friend the Member for West Birmingham (Sir A. Chamberlain) had played his notable part, with others, in securing that Treaty, was that the League itself—the Assembly of the whole League—gave its sanction to the Locarno Treaty, recommended it as a model, and urged that in appropriate cases similar arrangements should be sought in other parts of the world. The hon. Gentleman opposite just now descanted on the virtues of universality. I am quite willing to admit that truth is universal, but in this practical world you reach a situation from time to time which, if you want to deal with it effectively according to the practical conditions of the moment, can be much better dealt with by the immediate provision of a regional pact, as long as that regional pact is really fitted into the frame-work and system of the League. Only the other day the Council of the League passed a resolution, their very latest resolution, carried through at a special meeting on the French appeal in view of the decision which the German Government had announced, inviting the Governments which took the initiative in the plan of 3rd February, that is to say, the London Declaration, or which gave their approval to it—and I would point out that Germany was one of those countries which approved of the effort made in the



London Declaration—inviting those countries to continue the negotiations which were initiated and to permit the conclusion, within the League of Nations, of those regional arrangements, whether in the East of Europe or whether in the South of Europe, to which it more particularly referred. There is no ground whatever upon which anybody instructed on this subject could pretend that the effort to bring about a regional agreement for greater mutual assistance in a particular area of the world is a contradiction or a denial of the principles of the Covenant.

#### **British Responsibility Under the Locarno Pact.**

A very important question was put by my right hon. Friend, the Member for Darwen (Sir H. Samuel). It is much easier to put that question in a short sentence than to answer it exhaustively, with every possible variation. I will ask the Committee to allow me to answer the question dogmatically in two or three sentences. We shall have other opportunities, no doubt, of considering any conceivable complications or variations that may be suggested. His question was this. He was referring to the Treaty of Locarno, of which he is a supporter, and he said that there was some concern, and he would like to be assured, as to whether the responsibilities of this country—what he called the automatic responsibilities—under the Treaty of Locarno would be extended or affected if there were a Franco-Russian agreement and if thereafter conflict arose between Russia and Germany. The Committee is aware, if the report which reaches me is well founded, that in fact an agreement between France and Soviet Russia has been signed this evening. Therefore, my right hon. Friend's question is a very pertinent one.

Let us consider it. Suppose that Russia and Germany were to get into conflict and that France went to the help of Russia by invading Germany, would that bring this country automatically, as my right hon. Friend says, in on the side of Germany? The answer is "No." If Germany attacks Russia and in view of a Franco-Russian Treaty of Mutual Assistance France goes to the assistance of Russia by attacking Germany, the Locarno Treaty does not put this country in those circumstances under any obligation to go to the assistance of Germany. That is a general proposition, and I think that I shall be confirmed in it by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Birmingham (Sir A. Chamberlain). There is, for the purpose of completeness and accuracy, a proviso which should be stated, and it is this: In order that that

should be the position, in order that Germany should have no claim under Locarno upon us, then, of course, the assistance of France to Russia must be given in virtue of certain stipulations of the Covenant of the League of Nations, Article XVI and Article XV, paragraph 7, which is referred to in the Treaty of Locarno itself. The terms of the prospective Franco-Russian pact, so far as they were known to us—of course, we shall get this confirmed now—are, we are assured, such that all its provisions will be subordinate to the operation of the Locarno Treaty. It follows, therefore, that British obligations will not be increased any more than they were increased under the Locarno Treaty, by the treaties of mutual assistance which France concluded at the same time with Poland and Czechoslovakia. I have endeavoured to state the position in a few orderly sentences, and I hope that hon. Members who take a special interest in the subject, which has its technical side, will be good enough to read my words when they are reported in the Official Report. I would rather not indulge in further illustrations or qualifications without more mature consideration.

#### **Germany and Her Air Armaments.**

Now I must turn to another and most important question, which in its general aspect has quite rightly been made prominent in the Debate to-night, though it is agreed that in its more technical and special aspects it will be a topic of debate within a few days time. I am not going to spend my time on this serious matter in justification or anything of that kind. Suffice it to say that the information which was put before the House last November by the Government was put forward with candour, without any economy of information, and I would ask the House to realise that the service which is rendered to this country by the experts who consider these complicated questions and who furnish the Government and the country with all the information they can, is a service which is carried on under great conditions of obscurity. Certainly I stand here and speak for and take any responsibility for these faithful servants, who cannot speak for themselves. As a matter of fact, it will be found when the Debate takes place in a few days time we shall have to draw a pretty clear distinction between the information as to what was in fact the position last autumn in Germany and the calculation or estimate or prognostication as to how rapidly it would be possible or likely for Germany to increase her former provision.



The second is a matter of estimate, and *it will be found to be undoubtedly the case that the rate of production of aeroplanes in Germany has increased very much more rapidly than our advisers thought was likely when these calculations as to the future were presented to the House last Autumn.* As regards the actual figures of aeroplanes, it was stated—as far as information was available to us at the time, and I would warn the House not to assume that the figure then given was very wide of the mark. I will tell the House why. Whereas we here in the House then mentioned a figure which we said might run up to 1,000, the figure that had been given in the French Chamber, where it would not be suggested there was not a very keen watch being kept and where there was certainly no desire to minimise the dangerous facts—the highest estimate given in the French Chamber was 1,100. It is far more difficult to estimate how far the figure, whatever it was, should be regarded as constituting organized squadrons, or how far they were less developed. All those matters will come up in the Debate which will shortly take place. What is certain is, and I warn the House now, that the information which has come to us does go to show that *the rate of industrial production in Germany has been increasing lately very rapidly.*

It would be only right if I made one other statement of a numerical kind, for it is plain that when the debate takes place very shortly this figure will be one of the figures that will be desired; and therefore, having consulted the Prime Minister, I make the statement now, not for the purpose of further questioning or discussion this evening, but because it is right that Members here should have this figure in their minds before the coming debate. The statement which Herr Hitler made to the Lord Privy Seal and myself when we were in Berlin is a statement that has already been accurately reported to the House. It was made in answer to a question which I myself posed, and it was not made, of course, by technical experts or in the course of an elaborately technical discussion. The statement was a very general one, that Germany has already reached parity with this country. I have the duty of reporting that we have since ascertained with more precision what that statement was intended to imply, and I state the facts now. We have since been informed that that statement which was made to us was intended to imply that Germany's first-line strength was equivalent to a British front-line strength of some 800 or 850 aircraft. That is not including auxiliary or special

reserve units, but it is including the British figures of aircraft overseas. I think it right that as that additional piece of information is in our possession it should be stated.

#### **What Hitler Said in Berlin.**

In making a few further remarks, with careful consideration of the words I employ, I want to answer one or two very pertinent questions put to me by the right hon. Member for West Birmingham. I wish to remind the House that I have already made the statement—made I need hardly say after full consultation with the Lord Privy Seal—here in the House on 9th April, as to a large number of the matters of fact or matters of statement which emerged as a result of our visit to Berlin and the other visits paid by my right hon. Friend. I may say, having regard to the tremendous issues and responsibilities involved, I hesitate extremely to offer any estimates as to the amount of credence to be attached to this or the impression to be attached to that statement. At the same time, I would like to convey to the House, in more general terms, one or two conclusions which I formed in my own mind.

#### **Hitler Put Forward Germany's Final Military Requirements.**

*I think it would be fair to say that the German Chancellor throughout emphasized that his attitude was that he wished to state the final requirements of Germany.* He conveyed to us very strongly the impression that he considered that it would be wrong to advance certain demands now, in order to increase them later, just as it would be wrong to keep silent now and then start some new topic hereafter. I must say that this was illustrated in the very close discussion which we had on the subject of Germany's return to the League of Nations. I gathered that his view was that it would be an impossible situation if Germany were to return to the League and then put forward new demands hitherto undisclosed; and he claimed that for that reason, among others, he was putting what he had to say, frankly and fully and as I understood finally. In the case of the figures which he mentioned for a future German navy, and on which I gave the House information when I made my statement on 9th April, he pointed out that their practical realisation could not take place immediately; that they could only be realized in the course of time. On all that and in connection with the facts which he put up from beginning to end we understood that he was stating frankly, fully and finally the attitude which Germany



took up, and that he wished to assure us that this was not the first part of a piece-meal declaration. That, undoubtedly, was the impression which was produced on my right hon. Friend and myself, and I think it right that I should report it to the House.

#### **Hitler and the League of Nations.**

*We pressed most strongly for the return of Germany to the League of Nations, and in regard to that I must confess that I am in some respects very disappointed.* Some of his objections one could well follow and understand. His first objection was that the League of Nations in his view was associated with the system set up under the Treaty of Versailles, and that the Covenant was a part of the Treaty—to which the natural answer is: “If that be the stumbling block, let us work together to separate the Covenant and make it, with goodwill all round, a wholly independent document, though its origin inside the Peace Treaty is perfectly natural and absolutely intelligible.” That was his main proposition. I am reporting my own impression, and I have not the slightest doubt he was conveying a very deep feeling there is in Germany that Germany was in some way a country of inferior right. I need not tell the House that the representatives of the British Government challenged that proposition. We pointed out that Locarno had been followed by Germany's return to the League, that she was not merely a member of the League, but a permanent member of the Council, and that our own experience was that she had played her full part there.

#### **The Present Situation.**

I want, in conclusion, to say that the real effect of this Debate, and the real result of the position we have obtained is this: *We have undoubtedly, as the result of these recent inquiries, passed from a position in which everybody was feeling for the facts in a fog into a new position in which the facts, pleasant or unpleasant, are at any rate plainer than they were.* To that extent, I am convinced that these visits and explorations have served a useful purpose. Whether it be true that the whole facts are now known is quite another matter, but I consider that the case put at the beginning of the Debate by the Prime Minister is unanswerable, and I would venture to repeat it in this form: if it were true that our answer to this situation simply is that everybody must rearm and that is the end of the story, then there is no peace

to be got. On the other hand, *we may have a situation in which you must face the facts as they are and increase armaments, among other things, for the purpose of securing that there is no possibility of domination where what is wanted is equal treatment.*

#### **An Appeal to Germany to Act, Not Talk.**

It is not with any idea that armaments in themselves provide the final solution, but because it is the condition precedent to securing what is wanted now, that we ask for approval of the course we are taking, and we make this observation in all friendliness to Germany. Germany is by way of helping herself to equality by her unilateral act. Aye, but Germany was one of the Powers that signed the Five-Power Declaration which declared for equality in a system of security. *What is it that Germany is now prepared, not to say, but to do, in order to restore in some degree that sense of security which she must see has been so seriously prejudiced if not shattered by recent events?* After all, of whom is it that Germany is afraid? We have kept open the door; we have tried to clear the road. We are not engaged in a senseless, endless, hopeless competition, piling armaments upon armaments to the end of time, but we are bound to establish the safety of this country against all for the very purpose of making it possible to pursue that policy of promoting security and peace in Europe and the world, in which we cannot be suspect by anyone, in which we have a great work to do as mediator, and in which we implore Germany to show that she is prepared to take her part, not merely in words, but in deeds.”



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